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FURTHER INFLUENCES UPON IBSEN'S *PEER GYNT*II. BJØRNSON'S *Synnøve Solbakken*

Ehrhard was the first to point out the relation between these two works,¹ his attention having been especially struck by the similarity of the peasant-wedding in the first act of Ibsen's drama with the one in Bjørnson's story.

To enter somewhat further into details, the general similarity in character of the heroines, Synnøve Solbakken and Solvejg, is accentuated by the common element *Sol-* in the names of both and its symbolical significance, as has in fact been noted.² Synnøve's family belongs, as Solvejg's apparently does, to the pietistic sect of Haugianere, both girls appear with a psalm-book, both hold to their mother's skirts, Synnøve is displeased with the boisterousness of Thorbjørn and though interested in knowing he is a good dancer doesn't at first want to see him dance, which is at least approximately duplicated in the attitude of Solvejg

¹ *Henrik Ibsen et le théâtre contemporain*, 158ff. 1892.

² Woerner (*Henrik Ibsen*, , 390. 1900; still uncorrected in second edition, I, 411. 1912) translates Solvejg into "Sonnenmauer," his source being perhaps a dictionary rendering of *solvæg*. It is hardly necessary to say that the *-vejg* of *Solvejg* has nothing to do with the word *væg* (Old Norse *veggr*), but is an element forming the second part of several Old Norse women's names, its original meaning never having been conclusively cleared up. There was an Old Norse word *vejg* applying to a certain strong beverage and it is well known that brewing in Old Norse days belonged to the varied activities of woman, but that this word is identical with the homonymic element occurring in women's names is unlikely. More probable is the explanation of Noreen (*Altisl. und altnorw. Gram.*,³ §307, 3a. 1903; earliest in *Urgermansk juddlära*, p. 84. 1890), who connects it through Verner's law with Gothic *weihs*, "village" (Lat. *vīcus*, Grk. *οἶκος*, Skt. *veśas*), claiming for it then a force of domesticity. Such force of domesticity accords well with the elements most commonly preceding it in women's names. Further discussion is hardly pertinent to our present inquiry, which is concerned solely with the meaning the name may have had to Ibsen, but that was certainly not "Sonnenmauer." It may be of passing interest that the first part was perhaps not originally identical with *sol*, "sun" (Cf. Lind, *Norsk-isländska dopnamn*, 1016ff. 1913), but that the name was rather *Solvejg* (from *salr*?), Lind's conclusions as to the form of the name being confirmed by Aasen's Norwegian material (*Norsk Navnebog*, 36. 1878), though Aasen suggests a still different etymology. Solbakken is of course not a personal name as is Solvejg, but the name of the family farm; in Bjørnson's story the two estates Solbakken and Granli(d)en are in their contrast of name and nature meant to symbolize the characteristic traits of the respective families inhabiting them.

toward Peer, she refusing to dance with him because of his boisterous and unseemly behavior. Both show subsequently the same all-forgiving affection for the hero, both are ready to leave parents and home for him, and both make the same effort to save him from his worse self.

Thorbjørn is in part a kindred spirit to Peer. He is characterized as a liar, boaster and fighter; people do not like him and talk ill of him; he is also in his early years an eager listener to Eventyr. Both experience difficulty in approaching the heroine.

There is further an Ingrid in either work, though the two show no other similarity than that of name. The case is not quite the same with the two Aslaks, who resemble each other at least in malicious disposition, especially displayed in their attitude toward the hero in either case. In his rôle as teller of stories and general entertainer Bjørnson's Aslak is comparable rather with Peer himself. As Skræppe-Aslak he suggests Peer's father Jon.

Apart from the general similarity in the two peasant-weddings each has its tragic touch in the fact that the bride has no love for the groom, but prefers another, though in Ibsen's poem the circumstance is not emphasized as tragic.

Bjørnson's disquisition upon the important part played by the church in Norwegian peasant-life, where he particularizes upon the effect of the churchbells and psalms, finds perhaps an echo in the churchbell-ringing and psalm-singing that save Peer from the power of the trolls.

Ehrhard also saw clearly that the relation of Ibsen's work to Bjørnson's was satirical in its nature. As confirmatory of rather than in any noteworthy degree supplementary to Ehrhard's very accurate judgment a remark of Ibsen quoted by John Paulsen³ is of particular interest. The remark dates from 1880 and is to the effect that Bjørnson's *Synnøve Solbakken* formed the conclusion of the old romantic period. That is, it was for Ibsen a part of the whole Scandinavian romanticism with which he was definitively breaking in *Peer Gynt*, in that it represented a romantic conception of peasant-life with which Ibsen was not in sympathy.⁴

³ *Samliv med Ibsen, Anden samling*, 132. 1913.

⁴ The subject of the literary treatment of Norwegian peasant-life with especial reference to Bjørnson's stories is discussed at considerable length by Chr. Collin in his book on Bjørnson (*Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson*, II, 111ff. 1907); comment of Ibsen upon Bjørnson's *Arne* (1858) reported by Brandes (*Henrik Ibsen=Die Literatur* 32, p. 26. 1906) is also of interest in this connection.

A further indirect link between the two works deserves mention. Editor Bille writing in the *Dagbladet*⁶ called the language of *Synnøve Solbakken* and *Halte-Hulda* a "malebarisk dialekt." It is by no means inconceivable that it was this which suggested to Ibsen the idea of making his Huhu a champion of the language of the orang-outangs as opposed to that of Malebar. Not that Bjørnson is at this point being satirized in any way; quite the opposite is the case. Huhu is a "maalstræver," is in fact so labeled in case there be any doubt about the matter, and it is the Malebar language against which his efforts are directed. Ibsen was an admirer of Bjørnson's saga-style,⁶ his attitude toward the latter's language being very clearly expressed in a letter to his publisher Hegel, dated Feb. 20, 1869,⁷ in which, speaking of his mother-in-law Fru Thoresen's *Solen i Siljedalen*, he said in substance that both Bjørnson and himself could use words and expressions from popular speech because they knew their relation to the old language and so could tell which were justified. Fru Thoresen didn't know this and so used a literary hodge-podge that had never been, was not and could never become Norwegian.

A. LEROY ANDREWS.

Cornell University.

⁶ Cf. Collin, *Bjørnson*, II, 451; Bille's *Tyve aars journalistik* is unfortunately not accessible to me.

⁶ Cf. Collin, *Bjørnson*, II, 623 for Ibsen's idea (in 1862) of Bjørnson's saga-style.

⁷ *Breve fra Henrik Ibsen*, I, 177.